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New National Forests in Alaska

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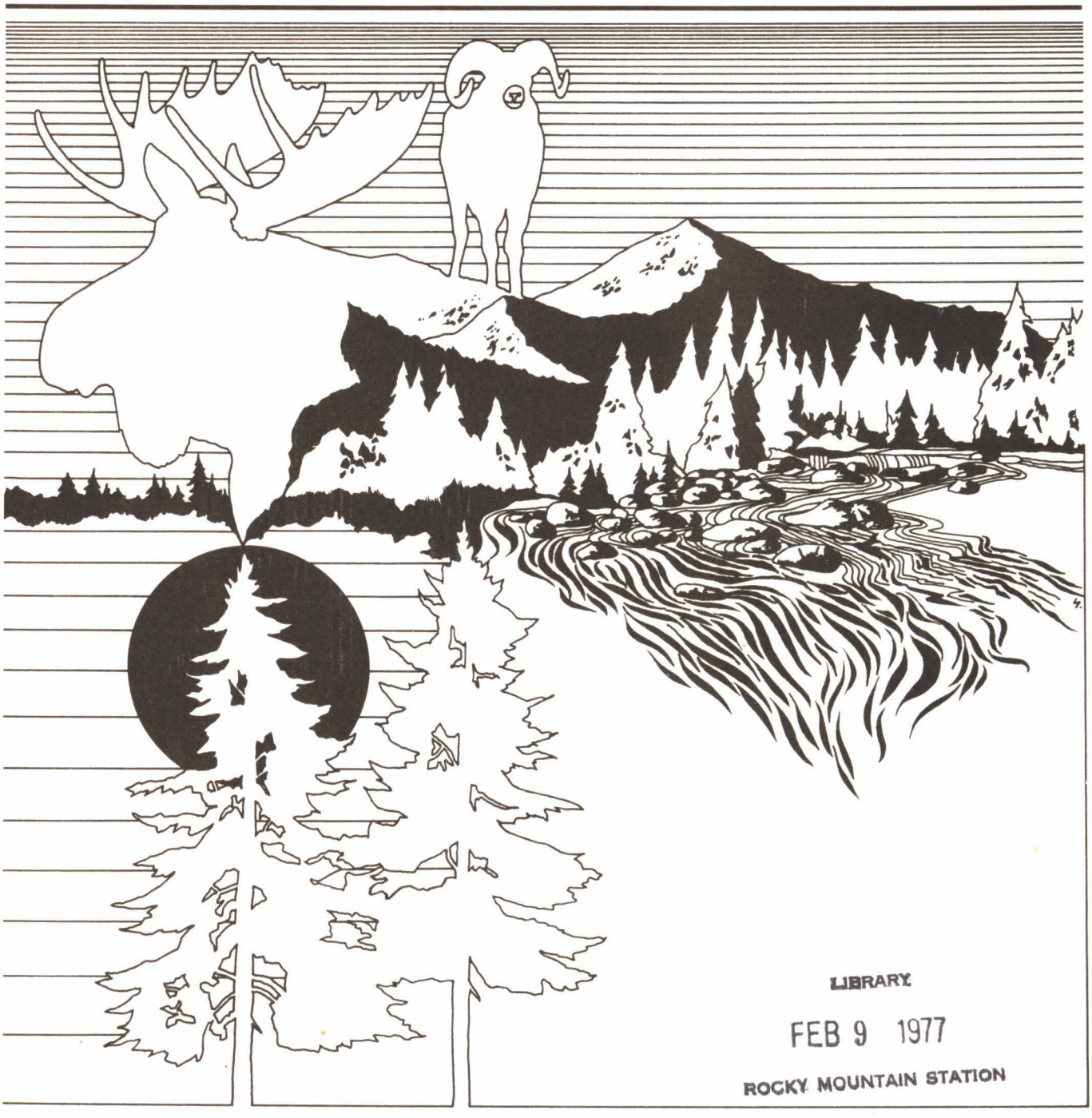

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Forest Service · U.S. Department of Agriculture
Current Information Report No. 12
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NEW NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALASKA
A PROGRESS REPORT

Background

Until Alaska became a State in 1959, most of its 375 million acres was held as public territory under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior. Upon being granted statehood, Alaska was authorized to select 103.5 million acres of the territory for State ownership. In eight years, the State selected about 25 million acres. Claims to the land by Alaska Natives (Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts) caused the Secretary of the Interior, in 1969, to freeze all land grants pending settlement of the Native claims.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

On December 18, 1971, Public Law 92-203, titled the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was approved. ANCSA provided for settlement of Native claims by: (1) creation of an Alaska Native Fund and (2) the formation of Regional and Village Corporations which could select lands from areas withdrawn by the Secretary of the Interior for selection purposes.

In addition to Native land selections, ANCSA provided for a Joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission for Alaska. The Commission has broad advisory powers in land use planning and in recommending Village and Regional selections. It also has a say on areas best suited for permanent Federal ownership.

Section 17(d)(1) of the Act gave the Secretary of the Interior power to withdraw lands to protect the public interest. These lands are usually called "d-1" or "public interest lands."

Additionally, section 17(d)(2) entitled the Secretary to withdraw up to 80 million acres from public domain lands for inclusion in the four "national conservation systems." These lands, commonly referred to as "d-2" or "national interest" lands, would be added to the National Forest, National Park, Wildlife Refuge and Wild and Scenic River systems.

Forest Service Study

To assist in the review of Alaskan public lands and to propose areas for consideration as new National Forests, the Forest Service, in April, 1972, assembled a small study team. Its members were from the Alaska Region and from Land Use Planning Staffs in other Forest Service regions. The Forest Service study was directed toward the 127 million acres withdrawn in March, 1973, by then Interior Secretary Morton as public interest and national conservation system lands.

In the study of these lands, the general criteria applied for inclusion into the National Forest system were:

(1) the areas should have nationally significant values.

(2) the areas should offer a range of resource uses.

(3) areas should be manageable units, based on drainages, ecological relationships, or existing or proposed transportation systems.

The areas meeting the above criteria, if retained in public ownership could be better managed under multiple use principles than under a system of prime or limited use.

Areas selected that satisfied these criteria were analyzed with the following factors in mind:

1. Physiographic features--soils, drainage, vegetation and accessibility.

2. Resource inventory--both renewable and non-renewable.

3. Socio-economic situation--including existing management and the feasibility of the unit for management.

4. Management alternatives--the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives were tested against the planning objectives, as expressed in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. These objectives provide for:

   - Environmental conservation

   - Community, industry and user stability and growth

   - Regional development

   - Coordinated planning between Federal, State and Native groups

   - Protection of public values

   - Determination of management, land use and ownership distribution

   - Identification and protection of public access needs

Study Team Findings

In 1972, the Forest Service Study Team finished a preliminary analysis of the d-1 and d-2 lands considered best suited for multiple use management. In July, 1973, it recommended almost 40 million acres in seven areas as suitable for new National Forests (Table 1). Also recommended were 2.6 million acres of additions to the existing Tongass and Chugach National Forests.

Table 1 - Areas found suitable for additions to the National Forest System

Unit	Total
- - - - - - million acres - - - - - -	
Wrangell Mountains National Forest	11.4
Fortymile National Forest	4.8
Porcupine National Forest	5.5
Lake Clark National Forest	3.7
Kuskokwim National Forest	3.6
Yukon National Forest	7.7
Koyukuk National Forest	2.7
Subtotal	39.4
Additions to Tongass/ Chugach National Forests	2.6
TOTAL.	42.0

Activities of Other Agencies

The Department of the Interior's National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Outdoor Recreation also had study teams in the field.

National Park Service efforts were directed towards areas of outstanding scenic, recreational or scientific interest. The Fish and Wildlife Service keyed in on important waterfowl- and seabird-nesting, feeding and staging areas, as well as on certain major big game ranges. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation studied the rivers of Alaska for their wild and scenic values.

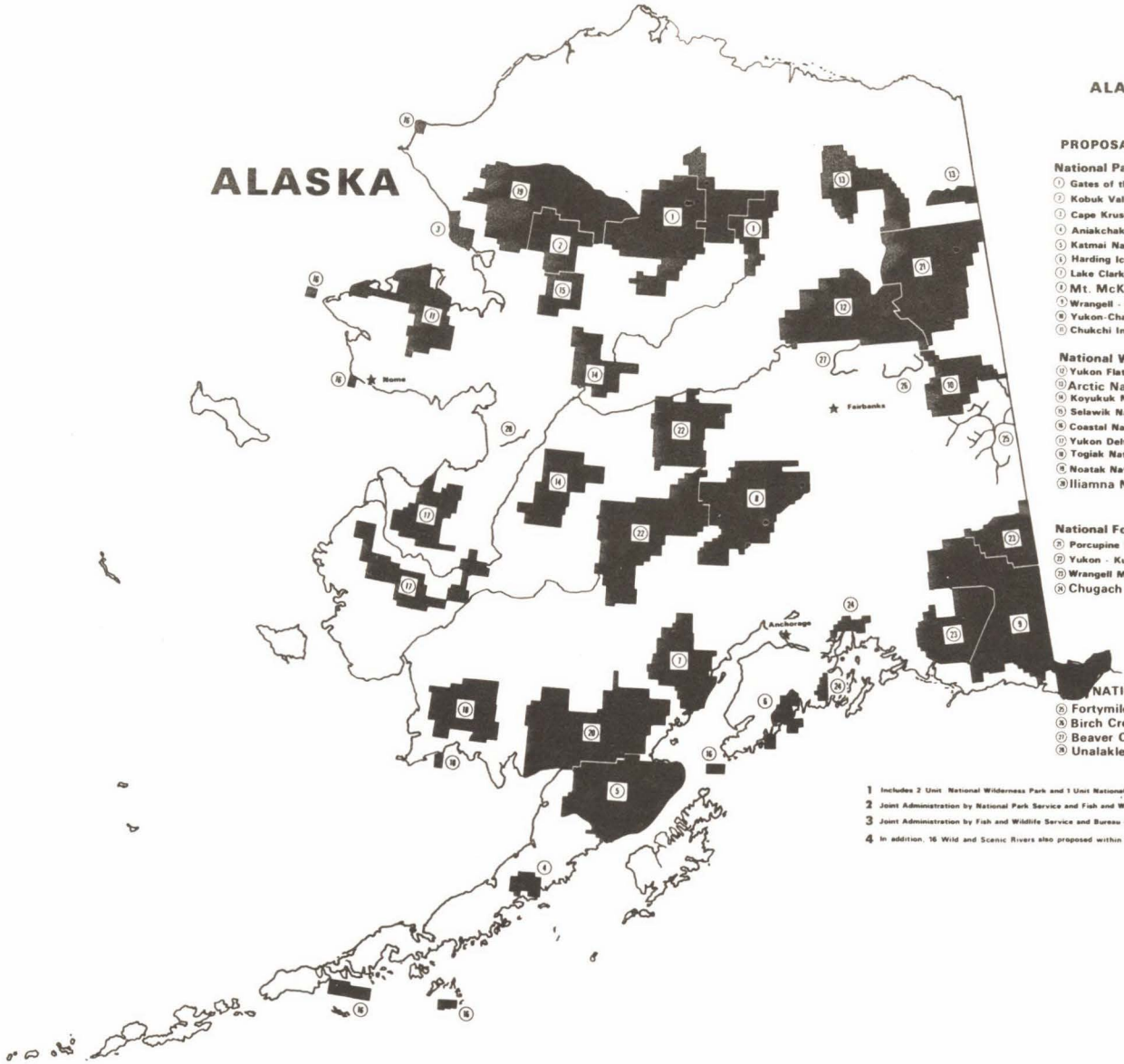
It was quite obvious that there were lands in Alaska suitable for inclusion into all of the four conservation systems. Also, it was inevitable that some areas considered suitable by one study team overlapped those found suitable by another.

The Secretary's Decision

The Secretary of the Interior reviewed the studies submitted by the four conservation agencies. He also reviewed recommendations from the Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission and from agencies such as the Bureau of Mines and the Geological Survey. These studies and recommendations provided the information for the Secretary's final recommendations.

On December 18, 1973, the Secretary of the Interior announced his recommendations and sent to Congress proposed legislation for the four Federal systems in Alaska. Included were recommendations for three major new National Forests, totaling 18.3 million acres, and 500,000 acres of additions to the Chugach National Forest; 32.3 million acres of National Parks; and 31.6 million acres of National Wildlife Refuges. He also recommended adding 20 new rivers to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, 16 of which lie within the boundaries of proposed National Parks, Refuges and Forests. His recommendations became known as the Alaska Conservation Act and constituted the Administration's proposal.

The Secretary's specific proposals are listed on the map on the opposite page.



PROPOSALS

AUTHORIZED BY
ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT
P.L. 92-203

December 18,1973

PROPOSAL NAME	MILLIONS OF ACRES
National Park System	
(1) Gates of the Arctic National Park	8.36
(2) Kobuk Valley National Monument	1.85
(3) Cape Krusenstern National Monument	0.35
(4) Aniakchak Caldera National Monument	0.44
(5) Katmai National Park	1.87
(6) Harding Icefield - Kenai Fjords National Monument 2	0.30
(7) Lake Clark National Park	2.61
(8) Mt. McKinley National Park Additions	3.18
(9) Wrangell - St. Elias National Park	8.64
(10) Yukon-Charley National Rivers	1.97
(11) Chukchi Imuruk National Reserve 2	2.69
Sub Total	32.26
National Wildlife Refuge System	
(12) Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge	3.59
(13) Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Additions	3.76
(14) Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge	4.43
(15) Selawik National Wildlife Refuge	1.40
(16) Coastal National Wildlife Refuge	0.07
(17) Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge	5.16
(18) Togiak National Wildlife Refuge	2.74
(19) Noatak National Arctic Range 3	7.59
(20) Iliamna National Resource Range 3	2.85
Sub Total	31.59
National Forest System	
(21) Porcupine National Forest	5.50
(22) Yukon - Kuskokwim National Forest	7.30
(23) Wrangell Mountain National Forest	5.50
(24) Chugach National Forest Additions	0.50
Sub Total	18.80
NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER SYSTEM 4	
(25) Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River	0.32
(26) Birch Creek National Wild River	0.20
(27) Beaver Creek National Wild River	0.20
(28) Unalakleet National Wild River	0.10
Sub Total	0.82
Total	83.47

1 Includes 2 Unit National Wilderness Park and 1 Unit National Wildlands

2 Joint Administration by National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service

3 Joint Administration by Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management

4 In addition, 16 Wild and Scenic Rivers also proposed within Parks, Refuges, and Forests.

National Forest System Proposals

Following are brief descriptions of the areas proposed as New National Forests:

Porcupine National Forest: This 5.5 million-acre proposal in East Central Alaska derives its name from the Porcupine River which bisects the area. It lies just south of the Alaska National Wildlife Range and adjoins the Canadian border. Consisting largely of broad river flats and low lying hills, with many lakes and waterways, the northern half of this proposal is above the Arctic Circle. The forests of the Porcupine cover 3.8 million acres. National Forest timber resources, along with Native timber resources could support a significant commercial wood products industry. Possibilities for oil and gas production exist in the Yukon Flats Basin. Some potential for gold, tin and lead production exists in the north portion of this sparsely settled country. These are major waterfowl breeding grounds, with habitat for upland wildlife, big game and fisheries. The area would receive careful resource development and management. Specific consideration would be given to the wetlands to protect waterfowl nesting habitat. The Upper Porcupine and Sheenjek rivers would be maintained in a primitive, freeflowing condition as components of the Wild and Scenic River system.

Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest: This 7.3 million-acre proposal spans the Middle Yukon and Kuskokwim River Valleys in Central Alaska. It is more than 75% forested with about 2.8 billion board feet of commercial timber. Eight Native villages rely upon fish and wildlife for subsistence hunting, fishing and trapping. Wildlife includes major game species, some of the finest furbearers and substantial fisheries. Extensive mineral exploration hasn't taken place on this proposed National Forest. However, records indicate that both gold and cinnabar were profitably mined in the past. Petroleum production potential is also present. Substantial opportunity exists for public hunting, fishing and other recreation dependent upon rivers and scenic values.

Wrangell Mountains National Forest: This 5.5 million-acre area is in two units flanking the proposed Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in south central Alaska. The southern unit of this proposal adjoins the Chugach National Forest. Its variety of outstanding resources includes minerals, recreation, fish, wildlife and scenery. It contains deposits of copper and associated minerals considered highly significant. Important for local and regional use is the 1.7 million acres of forest land. Fish and wildlife, especially Dall sheep, are renowned. Relative ease of access makes the Wrangell Mountains National Forest attractive to backpackers, hunters, fishermen and sightseers. The variety of available recreation in the area means recreationists could choose a wide

range of opportunities from roadside sightseeing to pure wilderness experience. The present regional population of about 5,000 depends heavily on tourism, transportation, government and the variety of natural resources available.

Chugach National Forest Additions: Two isolated areas have been proposed as additions to the Chugach National Forest. The 195,760-acre College Fiord, an icy and mountainous region of heavy precipitation, is located in the Prince William Sound area. The other area is the glacial, rocky Sargent Ice Field or Nellie Juan Unit. This 395,400-acre area is located on the Kenai Peninsula northeast of Seward. They will be managed as part of the Chugach National Forest for scenic enjoyment, recreation, wilderness and minor hunting and fishing opportunities.

Other Proposed Legislation

In addition to the Administration's proposal, several other bills were introduced in the 94th Congress. Table 2, "ANCSA Bills introduced in the 94th Congress," details those bills.

The emphasis on the establishment of new National Forests varies in seven different proposals from no acreage to 28.3 million acres.

Proposals have been made by the State of Alaska and the Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission. Both proposals reduce the amount of land dedicated to National Forests and multiple use. In fact, both the Alaska Resource Lands and Alaska National Lands System classifications propose dominant, rather than multiple, use.

Further Action

Congress has until December 18, 1978 to act. After this date, all national conservation system withdrawals which are not Congressionally classified will revert to public lands.

No action was taken on the bills shown in Table 2 during the 94th Congress. Therefore, new bills must be introduced in the 95th Congress. There is considerable public interest in the several proposals and new bills are expected early in the next session (Spring 1977). These new bills are expected to be similar to the proposals shown in Table 2.

ANCA (d2) BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE 94th CONGRESS

(in million acres)

Introduced Legislation	National Forest (multiple use)	National Parks	Wildlife Refuges	Wild & Scenic Rivers	Other	Total
Alaska Refuge Act HR 1520-Dingell, Michigan	-	-	68	-	-	68
Refuge Organic Act HR 1522-Dingell, Michigan	-	-	77.9 (1)	-	-	77.9
National Interest Lands Reservation Act HR 2063-Udall, Arizona S 1688-Jackson, Washington	1.6	47.8	43.2	1.6	11.9 (2)	106.1
Alaska National Public Lands Conservation Act HR 6848-Young, Alaska S 2676-Stevens, Alaska	28.3	13.9	-	.5	(7) 24.3 (3)	66.9
HR 9346-Udall, Arizona	-	47.8	-	1.6	11.9 (2)	61.3
HR 9585-Taylor, N. Carolina	-	32.3	-	0.8	-	33.1
Alaska Conservation Act (Administration Proposal) HR 7900-Haley, Florida HR 6089-Sullivan, Missouri S 1687-Jackson, Washington	18.8	32.3	31.6	0.82 2,605 miles	-	83.5
Proposal: Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission	4.87	20.17	18.32	0.49	44.33 (4)	88.18
Proposal: State of Alaska	4.6	16.7	15.3	-	62.0 (5) 9.1 (6)	98.6

(1) Also includes certain tidelands
(2) Classified as National Ecological Lands under N.P.S. Administration
(3) Classified as Scenic Reserve under joint Federal-State management
(4) Alaska National Lands System under joint Federal-State study and classification for prime use.
(5) Alaska Resource Land under joint Federal-State management according to prime use designated by the Congress.
(6) Lands classified for special study
(7) Recognizes need for and identifies primary transportation and utility corridors

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Now that the Secretary of the Interior has made recommendations to Congress, what happens?

A: Studies will continue. The joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission for Alaska and the Congress have held and will hold more hearings. The House and the Senate Interior Committees held limited overview hearings in the 94th Congress. Indications are there may be substantial action in the 95th Congressional session. It has also been suggested that (d)(2) decisions be delayed two years past the 1978 deadline, to allow further study.

Q: What plans does the Forest Service have for any new National Forests that Congress might designate in Alaska?

A: When Congress establishes these National Forests, the Forest Service plans to begin a five-year intensive land use planning process based on preliminary planning now underway. This process will involve interdisciplinary skills, cooperation with State, Federal, Native and local groups, and public involvement.

Q: What has the Department of the Interior been doing during this time?

A: A major effort was devoted to the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statements for the 28 proposed National Forests, Parks, Refuges and Wild & Scenic Rivers. The Final Statements were completed, published and distributed in January, 1975. Movies, slide shows, brochures and other related material are being prepared on the proposed new National Parks and Wildlife Refuges as part of a Nation-wide public information program. Legislative support material in the form of display maps, briefing books, pictures and slide shows are being prepared by the concerned agencies for the Congressional hearings. During the interim, traditional land uses will continue, under the Bureau of Land Management, in consultation with the four (d)(2) agencies.

Q: What has the Forest Service been doing during this time?

A: The Forest Service has worked closely with Interior in the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statements on the new National Forests, and is also working in the preparation of Legislative support material. In addition, a Nation-wide Forest Service information program is in progress. Land use planning in and around the proposed Forests in Alaska has been initiated.

Q: Are these programs an in-service effort?

A: No. There is an effort underway at this time to develop a Department-wide approach in meeting the greatly increasing roles and responsibilities of the Department of Agriculture in Alaska. This includes not only new National Forests, but also rural development,

agriculture, renewable resource management, land use planning in the State and private landowner assistance.

Q: Why is the Forest Service planning on areas not yet designated as National Forests, and how will they do this?

A: It's essential for the Forest Service to initiate land use planning on the proposed National Forests in order to be able to respond to Congress on management intentions or directions for these areas. This planning, currently getting underway, is designed as a regional planning concept. The University of Alaska is an active participant. It's being done in full partnership with other adjacent landowners including the State of Alaska, other Federal agencies and Native Corporations. This project will afford the Forest Service a superb opportunity to use its total planning capabilities, including its State and Private Forestry skills, towards an integrated regional land use planning effort.

Q: Specifically, where would the National Forests recommended in the Administration's proposal be administered from?

A: Preliminary plans indicate that the Wrangell Mountains National Forest would be headquartered initially in Anchorage with resource management personnel stationed at Glennallen or Copper Center. The Porcupine and the Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forests would have resource offices at Fort Yukon and McGrath, respectively. A Forest supervisor's office would be established in Fairbanks with permanent interdisciplinary employees and several part-time and seasonal employees, to develop and direct land use planning and management.

Q: What activities traditionally take place on National Forest lands that are different from those on National Parks or Wilderness Refuges?

A: Hunting, fishing and trapping are permitted on National Forest lands subject to State laws and regulations. In accordance with the general mining laws, prospecting and development of mineral resources is permitted. Also, when compatible with other resource values, timber harvesting is permitted on a sustained yield basis to ensure a continuous flow of forest products. National Forest lands may be used, under permit, for special uses which do not interfere with the public purposes for which the National Forests were created.

Q: Does the Forest Service have the necessary skills to manage the diverse resources and interests in the lands proposed for National Forests in Alaska?

A: Yes. The Forest Service is a leader among federal conservation agencies in the employment of persons with a wide variety of professional skills, including hydrologists, wildlife biologists, landscape architects, soil scientists, geologists, archeologists, economists, engineers and of course, foresters. This highly

skilled work force uses careful and thorough environmental analyses and planning as a part of land use management. Complex relationships between soils, geology, topography, climatic and biologic factors and human desires are assessed before any major developments are undertaken. National Forest administrators are backed by the Nation's largest federal wildland research organization. The Institute of Northern Forestry at Fairbanks, and the Forestry Sciences Laboratory at Juneau are part of this research organization.

Q: What is the timber resource of the proposed National Forests?

A: Proposed National Forests include over 12 million acres of forested lands, located mostly on the lower slopes and valleys of the Copper, Porcupine, Yukon and Kuskokwim River systems. Included with the wildlife habitat, recreation, watershed and other wild land values, are significant areas of commercially productive timber.

Interior forests include a mixture of white spruce, aspen, paper birch and balsam poplar. In species composition and volumes per acre they compare favorably with forests of the Lake States.

Proposed National Forests contain forested areas that adjoin ownership of Native Corporations and the State of Alaska. Timber from the proposed National Forests, combined with these State and private lands could support a substantial forest products industry in Interior Alaska.

Timber needs of Interior communities for house logs, mine timbers, lumber and firewood have traditionally been furnished by surrounding forests. It will be important that land use policies affecting the timber resource provide the necessary flexibility to utilize the timber resource to support local and State economies.

Q: Will the new National Forest areas contain designated Wilderness?

A: The proposed legislation does not create any new Wilderness areas in the National Forest proposals. The Forest Service as part of its land use planning will study wilderness along with other resource alternatives. Wilderness Study areas may be designated, but no prior commitment has been made to Wilderness since only Congress has the authority to designate Wilderness.

Q: Will new National Forest designations help support the Native (Indian, Eskimo and Aleut) populations of Alaska?

A: Yes. Native villages in close proximity to National Forests would be able to obtain house logs, fuel wood and other forest products under free-use permits. Subsistence hunting would continue under Alaska Fish and Game Department regulation. The Forest Service can work with

Natives to develop small local sawmills, and guide services for the growing tourist industry in Alaska. Opportunities for employment in the various resource management fields on the Forests would be possible for qualified Native people. Seasonal employment on fire crews, trail crews, and in associated management activities can be provided. The possibility of mineral development and oil and gas leasing on National Forest land offers further employment opportunities. Fish and game habitat improvement may provide local employment as well as increased stocks of wildlife and fish.

Q: How will new National Forests in Alaska benefit the Nation?

A: New National Forests in Alaska will provide many benefits to the Nation. For example, all Americans would have opportunities for a wide range of recreational activity--from developed campgrounds, picnic sites and trails, to wide open spaces for backpacking and hiking. Subject to state laws, hunting, fishing and trapping will be permitted in the true Alaskan tradition. Commercial ski areas can be developed where they will enhance recreation opportunities. The Forest Service cooperates with miners in the development of mineral and energy resources when such development is compatible with overall National Forest priorities. National Forest lands are managed on a sustained yield basis to ensure a continuous supply of the many forest products needed by all Americans. High quality water supply for fish and wildlife as well as for domestic and industrial use is ensured by National Forest management. Through special permits, National Forests in Alaska can be used for such things as trapper cabins, commercial fishing sites, water, gas, oil, telephone and power lines, airstrips, roads and trails, sawmill sites, and pastures and garden plots, provided such uses do not interfere with the public purposes for which the National Forests are created nor are detrimental to the environment. Endangered or threatened plants, animals, fish and birds are protected on National Forests. These are only some of the many benefits which would be provided to all Americans through multiple use management on new National Forests in Alaska.

Q: The Secretary has recommended 83 million acres of new permanent Federal reserves for Alaska. What will the breakdown of land ownership be then for the State?

A: Alaska's total acreage is 375 million acres. Presently private holdings are only 3 percent. Under the Alaska Statehood Act, the State is entitled to 103.5 million acres or about 28 percent and the Alaska Natives will receive about 45 million acres, 12 percent. The remaining 57 percent would be retained as federal reserves or public lands.

CURRENT INFORMATION REPORTS

No. 1	MINERAL KING (out-of-print)	February 1969
No. 2	LUMBER & PLYWOOD SUPPLY. (out-of-print)	March 1969
No. 3	GRAZING FEES ON NATIONAL FOREST RANGE (out-of-print)	June 1969
No. 4	FOREST SERVICE TIMBER APPRAISALS.	July 1969
No. 5	MEETING FUTURE NEEDS FOR SOFTWOOD LUMBER AND PLYWOOD.	September 1970
No. 6	TIMBER MANAGEMENT FOR A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT (out-of-print)	May 1971
No. 7	FOREST SERVICE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF FORESTRY DEANS.	June 1972
No. 8	OUTLOOK FOR MEETING FUTURE TIMBER DEMANDS.	December 1972
No. 9	PROPOSED NEW WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS. (out-of-print)	January 1973
No. 10	FOREST-RANGE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY.	May 1973
No. 11	NEW WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS. (Supercedes CI Report No. 9)	October 1973
No. 12	NEW NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALASKA	Revised January 1977
No. 13	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE (out-of-print).	August 1974
No. 14	MINING IN NATIONAL FORESTS.	January 1975
No. 15	STRETCHING THE NATION'S TIMBER	October 1975
No. 16	THE NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT OF 1976	December 1976

NEW NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALASKA is No. 12 in a series of Current Information Reports prepared to keep Forest Service employees informed on topics of Servicewide interest.

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